

Pilgrim Background

The Bible From Latin to English

Until the latter part of the sixteenth century, the only Bibles available were printed in Latin. After the Reformation began the Geneva Bible was published in English. For the first time the common men were able to read the Scriptures for themselves. The Geneva Bible is the version that would have been most familiar to the older generation of Pilgrims. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, King James authorized another translation of the Bible into English, which still bears his name [The King James Version]. Until these English versions came into being, the common man was not able to read or understand the Scriptures. It was necessary for the ministers and church officials to tell the worshippers what was in the Bible and interpret the Scriptures. As the English translations became more readily available, the people were able to read the Scriptures for themselves, and controversies began to arise concerning the interpretation of many passages in the Bible. Other controversies arose concerning the rituals of the church service.

The State Church

At the time the Pilgrim Fathers were living in England there was only one church approved by the English rulers. Everyone was required to attend that church - and ONLY that church - every week. If the English ruler were Protestant, all people of the realm were required to follow the Protestant beliefs and attend those church services; if the ruler were Catholic, everyone in the kingdom was required to practice the Catholic faith and rituals. All religion in the kingdom was strictly dictated by the government. This is what we call a "State Church."

The reigning ruler appointed the archbishop of his or her choice and every church in the kingdom was under the direct orders of the ruler and the archbishop. There was no freedom to choose what a person believed or how he could worship.

Anyone who objected to the beliefs of the state church or the forms of the church services could be arrested, questioned and thrown into prison. If they refused to give up their personal beliefs, they could be tortured in an effort to make them agree with the state church. If they still refused to give up their convictions after torture, they could be executed. Many people were imprisoned, tortured and put to death. Those who were executed for their religious beliefs died painful deaths. Many were hanged and quartered, some were burned at the stake, while others were crushed to death under heavy weights.

There were two major groups of believers who disagreed with the beliefs and practices of the Church of England. One group wanted to stay in the church, but hoped to change its forms of worship: This group was called "Puritan" because they wanted to "purify" the church. The other group did not believe the state church could be changed: This group was called "Separatist" because they wanted to separate completely from the Church of England.

At the beginning of the 1600s, a group of Separatists began to gather at Scrooby in the northeastern county of Nottingham. Scrooby was located on the main post road which ran between Scotland and London. When Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603 and James VI of Scotland was to become James I of England, he traveled the post road on his way to be crowned.

James I was a Protestant and the Separatists were hopeful he would be more tolerant of differing religious views. It was not long, however, before the Separatists learned that differing religious views would not be allowed under the new king.

Separatists (Pilgrims)

One group was called the Separatists because they demanded a complete separation from the Church of England. They wanted to worship in a very simple manner without all of the ritual and symbols which were used in the Anglican Church. In their study of the Bible they had decided the original church in New Testament times had been a simple church and they wished to follow that example in their own worship. They believed there were so many changes needed to be made in the Anglican Church that it could not be accomplished to their satisfaction. Therefore, the only possibility for them was to "separate" completely from the state church.

Their pastor, Richard Clyfton, had guided this religious community into a form of democratic self-government. Various points of view were tolerated, but the will of the majority ruled in decision-making. The members of this group believed in equal rights and equal duties for members of its congregation. Our modern concepts of a democratic system of government began with Pastor Richard Clyfton. It was their Pastor John Robinson who first coined the word "independent" in the matter of self-government.

The Pilgrims were warm, generous and thoughtful in their dealings with their fellow citizens and with the Indians they met in America.

Their manner of dress was typical of the ordinary fashions in England at that time. We know from Wills and Inventories of that early period that some of the leading men wore brightly colored clothing. Some even wore breeches of red, green or violet. This is a far cry from the dark, somber clothing of the Puritans which we see pictured every Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims were a good-natured, fun-loving people who loved life and insisted on the freedom of choice.

It was the Pilgrims who established Plymouth Colony. It was the Pilgrims who celebrated that first Thanksgiving with the Indians. It was the Pilgrims who brought our American principles of democratic government into being - **not** the Puritans.

Puritans

The other major group in opposition to the Church of England was the Puritan group, which believed that the Anglican Church could be changed to their satisfaction. They simply wanted to "purify" the church by eliminating the objectionable aspects of worship in the established church. This became a rather severe and militant group. Their church authorities ruled every aspect of their lives and, like the Church of England, they were extremely intolerant of any points of view which conflicted with their own dogma.

In their enthusiasm to keep their religion "pure," they were extremely severe in their punishment of anyone who would oppose them: Witness the atrocities during the witch-trials in Salem. They dressed in dark and somber clothing with no fashionable decorations. Gaudy apparel was certain to be an indication of the devil at work.

The Pilgrims and the Puritans were poles apart in their religious views, their systems of government, their everyday attitudes, and their style of clothing.

First Attempt To Leave England

By 1606 the Separatist group in Scrooby (in the northeastern county of Nottingham) decided that the situation in England had become so intolerable that they would have to leave England in order to find religious freedom. At that time Holland was tolerant of varying religious beliefs and the Scrooby Separatists decided that this might be an ideal place for their relocation. Other religious groups from England were already establishing themselves in several Dutch cities. One group of Separatists had already settled in Amsterdam, and the Scrooby Separatists planned to join them.

In 1607 the Scrooby Separatists made their first attempt to leave England bound for Amsterdam. However, their plan to leave England was discovered by the English authorities and they were arrested during their attempted departure. Many of the men were jailed for this action. Among the group was William Brewster, who would become a leader of the Scrooby Separatists.

The Separatists Depart for Holland

In 1608 the Scrooby congregation made another attempt to leave England. During this attempt they were again troubled by the authorities who discovered their plot. The men had already boarded the ship, but the women and children were still on shore when the authorities arrived. The Dutch captain of the ship was forced to depart with the men, while the crying women and children on shore were taken into custody by the authorities. However, it was not long until the Separatist families were rejoined in Amsterdam.

Through the following years a number of other Separatists from England made their way to Holland to join the growing numbers in exile.

In looking at the map entitled *English Homes of the Pilgrims*, you will notice that the original nucleus of the Separatist congregation came from the Scrooby area in northeast England. However, the members of the Separatist group from Leiden together with the "strangers" came from many places throughout England.

Name _____

Hour _____

Pilgrim Back Ground 5-4-3-2-1

Follow each step below. Remember if I can't read it, I will mark it wrong.

5: write 5 interesting facts that you have learned from the reading

4: Write 4 new vocabulary words that were in the reading

3: Write 3 situations that caused problems for this group in England

2: List the 2 groups of dissenters from the article

1: Write 1 newspaper headline that summarizes what you have read.